

LORD CHATHAM'S

SPEECH IN THE

HOUSE OF LORDS

ON FRIDAY THE 20th. OF MAY 1777.

LORD CHATHAM made his public entry into the House, in Flannel, bearing a crutch in each hand. Five minutes before three, his Lordship, sitting in his place with his hat on, both of which deviations from the customary rules of debate he prayed as a favour and indulgence, delivered himself substantially, and in several parts of his speech literally, as follows:

My LORDS,

The affairs of this country are in so precarious and critical a situation, that I could not consistently with my duty, any longer postpone submitting my thoughts to this House, in humble expectation, that whatever I may offer, will be received as intended only for the dignity honour, and interest of my country to promote the lustre of the Crown, the ease and happiness of my Sovereign, and the general benefit of every part of the British empire. If the effect of the motion I am going to propose to your Lordships should arrest the hand of power, and were to answer the zeal and earnest wishes of him who makes it, he would indeed be equally happy and successful. - My Lords, in explaining the objects of my motion, I wish to keep every thing from your recollection, that may give you pain; but while I state to your Lordships the grounds of the proposition I am about to make, it is indispensably necessary that I should tell your Lordships what has caused the evils with which we are at present threatened. My Lords, you voted away the property of the Americans without their consent; when they complained, you would not hear their complaints; and when they were factious, seditious, and rebellious. You gave your subjects on the other side of the Atlantic, about a penny tax upon tea; you have spent many millions in support of this tax. The war, my Lords, is got to a height no man could foresee: to a height which now threatens ruin and destruction to this country. America is lost. I fear England is undone. What have you done, my Lords? You have rendered Britain a dependent state; dependent on the precarious friendship, or more precarious neutrality of France. What will you do, my Lords? You condemned a whole province without hearing, without even demanding satisfaction for the injury sustained. You proscribed them; you shut up their ports and harbours; you robbed them of their chartered rights, you deprived them, my Lords, of their most valuable privileges of the unalienable birth right of an Englishman, the trial by Jury; the trial of the vicinage of Judges acquainted with the parts, the offence, the provocation, and the measure of punishment. What was the consequence, my Lords? Three millions of people refused to be bound by your arbitrary edicts. - I beg your Lordships pardon: Ministers were mistaken; it was Englishmen that were to be bound and enslaved. My Lords, they refused it. The skill and bravery of your Generals the prowess of your troops the strength and pride of this once powerful country, your Navy, was found insufficient. What my Lords, were you obliged to do? You could not procure men at home; Englishmen do not like to enslave Englishmen, nor trample on the rights of their fellow-subjects. What did your Lordships do? You hired 20,000 German Boors; your Ministers, I say hired them to cut the throats of your inoffending Colonists. Those Colonists are now, my Lords, called Rebels; they are stigmatized with every base and abusive epithet in the English language. Yet I remember my Lords, when this country was waging war with the united powers of France and Spain, when there was rebellion, and a Scotch rebellion within this land. I remember when our fleets were useless, our armies unsuccessful, that these men, now described as the hotbed of sedition and treason; that Colony against which the keenest lightnings of Government are denounced, and have been directed, I remember, I say, my Lords this very Colony lending forth the four regiments of undisciplined militia, which gave the first check to France in her proud career, and erected the standard of conquest on the walls of Louisbourg. But, my Lords, we need not point out particular facts, in proof of the bravery, the Zeal, the duty and affection of this people; the

annals of the last war will tell such of your Lordships, as are not old enough to remember, how they fought, and how they bled; they will tell you, how generously they contributed, how like loving brethren they shared the common burden and the danger. These, my Lords, are the unhappy men you have cruelly devoted to destruction; whose towns you would raze, whose commerce you would annihilate, whose liberties you would destroy by the sword, whose properties you would confiscate, and whose persons you would enslave; these are the people whom your Ministers would extirpate. What has been the system pursued by Administration, and what have been the measures taken for carrying it into execution? Your system has been a government erected on the ruins of the constitution, and founded in conquest, and you have swept all Germany of its refuse as its means. There is not a petty, insignificant Prince whom you have not solicited for aid; you are become the suitors at every German Court; and have your Ministers enrolled in the German Chancery, as the contracting parties, in behalf of this once great and glorious country, laurels of Britain are faded, arms are disgraced, her negotiations are spurned at, and her councils fallen into contempt. my Lords you have vainly tried to conquer America, by the aid of German mercenaries, by the arms of 20,000 undisciplined German Boors, gleaned and collected from every obscure corner of that country: you have subsidized their masters; you have lavished the public treasures on them; and what have you effected? Nothing, my Lords but forcing the Colonists to declare themselves Independent States. You have routed them, my Lords, to act with vigour and resolution; you have united and combined them you have by this unnatural act cemented them and given them but one soul. Their breasts, my Lords, are filled with indignation; they are fired with just resentments; they burn with ardour to avenge their injuries, and retaliate with interest on their cruel and merciless oppressors. Yes, my Lords, I say three millions of freemen will never submit to twenty thousand mercenaries. No my Lords, the idea is preposterous; the attempt is absurd; as well might I expect to conquer them with this crutch, as to suppose that America will ever submit to so contemptible a force. I would recommend peace to your Lordships at all events; the longer the unhappy contest is continued, the more difficult it will be to conciliate, and the less able we shall be to prosecute with vigour or effect or accommodate with honour or advantage. Ministers as they have blundered from the beginning are led into a fatal error, respecting our natural enemies, the French. They imagine that nothing is to be dreaded from that quarter because France has not intertered directly in favour of America. But, my Lords, do Ministers when they build such mighty things on this circumstance, recollect, that they argue as if France were mad. Would they have France run the risk, hazard, and expence of a war, when Britain is doing all for France she can possibly wish or desire? It was a gross misconception to suppose, that France ever thought a single minute about giving a direct aid to the Colonies; she never meant, my Lords, to interrupt this country in its wild career, or stand between it and its Colonies. No my Lords, she has taken care, from her conduct, to feed and nourish the mad notions of conquest and dominion, which have unfortunately prevailed within these walls. She has been equally sedulous to give just, that degree of countenance and protection, which have hitherto served to keep the civil war alive, so as to baffle your designs, and to waste your strength. This cruel and unnatural war, my Lords, I dread, will be a fatal war; you have proscribed your own children; you have turned a deaf ear to their dutiful petitions, their fervent entreaties; and have interpreted their honest constitutional remonstrances, into treason and rebellion. You have, my Lords, lost America; you have poured the riches of America into the lap of the House of Bourbon. Will France forget her own interest so much as to think of war? To effecting at the rate of twenty millions per annum. France, my Lords, knows her own interest better. France is filling her arsenals with naval stores, she is disposing of her manufactures. She is accumula-

ing in her store-houses, the produce of America. She is thereby preparing for war; she is cultivating and extending her commerce, and wisely opening new sources of internal wealth and external strength, while we continue daily to waste our own strength, while our commerce languishes, and while our specie, leaves the kingdom to purchase those commodities, which, besides the common advantages derived from them in a commercial view, were all received in exchange for our own manufactures. We have, my Lords, tried hitherto to no purpose. Is there the most distant rational prospect, that affairs will wear a better face at the end of this year than they did the last? We have exerted our utmost strength to little or no purpose. We have talked of conquering America. Have we done it? No, my Lords, we have nothing to boast of but a few trifling advantages, which, when we consider the price paid for them, and the circumstances which attended the obtaining them, wear in fact every solid appearance of defeat. We continue to send troops, and have voted millions; and what, my Lords are we told. That our army, after such enormous supplies, will be just equal to what it was last year, when it effected nothing, or next to nothing.

His Lordship shewed the absurdity of relying longer on the mere force of arms, and very pathetically pressed the necessity of a speedy conciliation. We were, he said, on the brink of a precipice, on the very verge of destruction; and desired their Lordships to snatch the present moment, as probably the last, in which they would have the opportunity of procuring the national salvation. A few weeks, nay a single day's delay might be too late. War, says his Lordship, has been tried; let us, my Lords, see what conciliation will do; let us recollect our critical situation; let us consider, should we persevere in the same, wild, ruinous, and oppressive system, the inevitable alternatives with which we are surrounded on either hand. Should we lose America, America will be added in fact to the French empire, should we prove successful in the struggle, debilitated, exhausted, and impoverished as we must be, we shall in that event have conquered America for France. If not waiting for either of those events, France should change her present system, which I can hardly think she will, except by some very unexpected change in her Councils, then America, as a matter of course, will be lost for ever to this country. Should this latter be the case, and that she should make a public avowal of her sentiments, by supporting the cause of America; though we had but five ships of war in the world, I should instantly be for declaring war against her, as the only reparation that could possibly satisfy the wounded honour of a great nation, be the event what it might. His Lordship reminded the House, likewise, of the propositions moved by his bill and motion early in 1775, before a drop of blood had been shed on either side; pointed out the fatal policy which caused their rejection; and the very violent and indecent manner in which they were rejected. His Lordship spoke for fifty minutes precisely, and then made his motion,